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## ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S EARLY VISITS TO CHICAGO.

BY J. SEYMOUR CURREY

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Some ten years ago I was engaged in preparing the manuscript for the history of Chicago, afterwards published under the title of "Chicago: Its History and Its Builders." In the course of this work I had occasion to describe the River and Harbor Convention held in Chicago in July, 1847, which was attended by hundreds of delegates and visitors, according to report sent in by Horace Greeley to his paper, the New York Tribune.

Among the delegates to that convention was Abraham Lincoln who was described by Greeley in these words: "In the afternoon Hon. Abraham Lincoln, a tall specimen of an Illinoisan, just elected to congress from the only Whig district in the state, was called out, and spoke briefly and happily. The Chicago Daily Journal in its issue of July 6th says: "Abraham Lincoln, the only Whig representative to congress from this state, we are happy to see, is in attendance upon the convention. This is his first visit to the commercial emporium of the state, and we have no doubt his visit will impress him more deeply if possible with the importance and inspire a higher zeal for the great interest of river and harbor improvements."

This quotation from the Journal was repeated in Fergus' Historical Series, No. 18, in which is printed a report of the proceedings of the convention, and also in my history above referred to. But the statement that this was Mr. Lincoln's first visit seems to have been erroneous as subsequent quotations from other sources tend to prove.

Some years later, while perusing Henry W. Blodgett's "Autobiography," I found mention of an earlier visit of Mr.

Lincoln's to Chicago. Judge Blodgett relates that in the early part of June, 1844, he was a law student in the office of J. Young Scammon in Chicago, and while he was at work one morning before breakfast sweeping the office and dusting the furniture, as law students were expected to do in those days, "the door opened and the tall, gaunt figure of a man stepped in and stood with one hand on each door jamb. He called out to me, 'Is Scammon in?' I went forward and said, 'No, sir, Mr. Scammon is not in; he doesn't get in as early as this.' 'Well, what time will he be in?' he asked. I said, 'About nine o'clock,' and I went on with my dusting and the gentleman sat down."

After waiting a while he finally started to go and said, "If Scammon comes in before I get back, say to him that Lincoln called and will call again later." It thus appears that instead of the visit of Mr. Lincoln to Chicago as a delegate to the River and Harbor Convention in July, 1847, being his "first visit", as the Chicago Journal reported, he was a visitor at Mr. Scammon's office in June, 1844, some three years before.

Now comes to hand the "Wisconsin Magazine of History" in which is printed an article by Professor Julius E. Olson of the University of Wisconsin, entitled, "Lincoln in Wisconsin." Presuming that the reader is familiar with Lincoln's first visit when he was a member of the volunteer forces of Illinois in the Black Hawk War of 1832, Professor Olson refers to Lincoln's "second visit" to Wisconsin, the details of which appear in the course of the article.

"Lincoln's second visit to Wisconsin," writes Professor Olson, "has been veiled in more or less mystery. After a record in popular tradition of nearly half a century, an account of it appeared in the 'History of Washington and Ozaukee Counties', published in 1881 by the Western Historical Company," of Chicago. In that portion of the history pertaining to Port Washington in Ozaukee county, it is stated that Mr. Lincoln once walked from Milwaukee to Sheboygan, a distance of about

forty-seven miles, and on his return a few days later stopped over two days at Port Washington.

"The record of the county history," continues Professor Olson, "is in some details supplemented by an interview furnished by Harry W. Bolens, ex-mayor of Port Washington, which appeared in the Milwaukee Daily News during the year of the Lincoln centenary when so many incidents of Lincoln's career came to light. The interview refers to the story as told in the county history, but gives the additional, though incidental, information that Lincoln's visit was some time between 1835 and 1840, the exact year is not known. He visited Sheboygan but concluded that that place had no future before it. He returned to Port Washington and stopped there for two days during which time he arranged with 'General' Harrison for the rent of quarters for his law office. This was in the fall of the year, and the arrangement was that Mr. Lincoln should return in the spring and take possession of his quarters."

This "General" Harrison was a local celebrity who enjoyed a reputation among his neighbors for story-telling, and was "much sought after by the early settlers when any great gathering was to be held, to create mirth for the crowd."

Subsequent events, however, prevented Mr. Lincoln carrying out his intention of finding a new home in Wisconsin. As the period of his visit was at a time when he was a resident of New Salem where, in fact, he was postmaster from 1833 to 1836, it is thought by Professor Olson that his search for a new home was in consequence of the death of Ann Rutledge, to whom he was engaged to be married. Ann Rutledge died August 25, 1835. He suffered severely from grief and lost his health and spirits, so that his friends advised him to seek another place of abode where he might find a change of scene and form new associations. He had not yet finished his law studies but was expecting to do so soon and in fact was admitted to the bar in the following year. Professor Olson fixes the date of Mr.

Lincoln's visit to Wisconsin to be in the latter part of October, 1835.

As the route of travel most frequented between southern points and Milwaukee, from which place he took his departure on his journey to Sheboygan, it seems reasonable to infer that he traveled by way of Chicago along the Indian trail leading from that place north to Green Bay. Whether by land or water he must have passed through Chicago, and if this be a safe inference we may say that Mr. Lincoln viewed Chicago many years before his visit as a delegate to the River and Harbor convention of 1847, which was reported by the *Chicago Journal* as his "first visit".

Considerable risk is involved when a writer declares that a certain person or event is the "first" in its origin or occurrence. A statement of that kind is liable to be disputed and earlier instances are often found. In Hurlbut's "*Chicago Antiquities*", the author enumerates fifty-four instances of "first things",—"first settler", "first post-office", "first church", "first school", "first tavern", "first man hanged", etc. And yet in a majority of the cases cited controversies have arisen in regard to the priority claimed for them.

Commenting upon the claims thus made (for example, giving the name of the "first settler of Chicago"), the late Reuben Gold Thwaites, renowned historical writer, once said: "I doubt if any known person can safely be called the 'earliest settler' of Chicago. The habitants and traders went back and forth like Arabs. Chicago was long a noted point for Indian gatherings and trade. No doubt there was a succession of temporary visitors, residing any time from a few months to several years at this site during the entire French regime, but especially in the eighteenth century, concerning which period the records are unfortunately scanty."

We have shown in this article that the date of Mr. Lincoln's first visit to Chicago is by no means a settled fact, notwith-

standing the record heretofore accepted in regard to it. In these days when the whole body of our early literature is thoroughly searched for mention of Mr. Lincoln, his movements, his sayings, his personal traits, and every trifle of his daily life, in order to bring them to the knowledge of posterity, we may find that many other statements, previously accepted as true in regard to his distinguished career, have been completely upset, and the record accordingly must be revised.